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Cuba Reduces Its Armed Forces

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Cuba Reduces Its Armed Forces

Since Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959, he has succeeded in molding the Cuban armed forces into the most modern and effective fighting force in Latin America. During this time Castro has acquired sufficient modern jet fighters, naval combat units, tactical missiles, tanks, artillery pieces, electronic gear, and other assorted equipment from the Soviet Union to enable his military establishment to defend the island against anything short of a major invasion.

The role of the military establishment began to change in 1967. Although national defense and maintenance of public order have remained the primary mission, the armed forces have become increasingly involved in activity normally considered outside the realm of military affairs. Many nonmilitary responsibilities such as cane cutting, road building, land clearing, construction, and other tasks geared to aid the economy were shifted to the armed forces, and military officers were placed in charge of a growing number of government entities ranging from ministries and autonomous agencies to state farms.

There now is mounting evidence that another significant change is in progress in the armed forces. Castro is reducing the amount of manpower, materiel, and resources that is normally devoted to maintaining the sizable military establishment. Although he is apparently willing to sacrifice part of his armed might in order to meet economic needs, even a massive diversion of manpower and resources from the armed forces—a step Castro is not prepared to take—would do little to change the economic situation. The over-all effect that reductions will have on the combat capability of Cuba's armed forces will hardly be favorable, but it is still too early to attempt to assess their full impact.

Present Level of Armed Forces

Cuba's military establishment, which consists of some 140,000 men and an additional 71,000 reservists, is the best trained and best equipped in Latin America. Untested in combat since the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, it is still widely presumed to be the most effective fighting force in Latin America. The basic mission of the armed forces is to maintain internal order and guard against external attack, and this it has done quite efficiently ever since Castro assumed power.

The military comprises the Air/Air Defense Force (DAAFAR), the Revolutionary Navy (MGR), and the ground forces. DAAFAR is divided into two main branches consisting of the Revolutionary Air Force (FAR) and the Air Defense Force, which is responsible for the surface-to-air (SAM) missile and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) units.

The Revolutionary Air Force has an inventory of approximately 160 jet fighter aircraft consisting of MIG-15s, MIG-17s, MIG-19s, and

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MIG-21s. The ten MIG-19s, however, have been nonoperational since April 1967, and the MIG-15s are being phased out of operation. As a result Cuba relies primarily on its complement of 91 MIG-17s and MIG-21s, which are strategically located in the three air defense zones—western, central and eastern. Approximately half of the MIG-21s are located at the San Antonio de Los Baños Air Base near Havana.

The Air Defense Force operates scores of AAA emplacements and directs Cuba's SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system. The 17 operational SAM sites are situated to protect the military installations in and near Havana and in the Cienfuegos - Santa Clara area of Las Villas Province. There is no evidence that Cuba has received a more advanced air defense missile system than the SA-2. An SA-3 site under construction at Punta Ballenatos just west of Havana in mid-1967 was reconfigured for the conventional SA-2 system before construction was completed.

The navy is a relatively small but potent force. The backbone of the MGR consists of 18 KOMAR patrol boats armed with two STYX cruise missiles each. The KOMARs are backed up by six KRONSTADT and 12 SO-1 class submarine chasers, which are used primarily for off-shore patrolling, and two dozen P-4 and P-6 class motor torpedo boats. A small force of coastal radar surveillance posts, reduced in number in the past year, is also a part of the MGR.

The ground forces are made up of an estimated 119,000 men on active duty backed up by 71,000 ready reservists. The main items of equipment are 700 to 800 tanks and self-propelled guns, several hundred other armored vehicles, and more than 1,300 artillery pieces and antitank guns of various sizes. A recent innovation in the ground forces is the formation of at least one company-sized paratroop unit.

The primary source of manpower for the armed forces is the compulsory military service (SMO) draft. All Cuban males between the ages of

16 and 45 are subject to military service. Students, however, are usually exempt. The general educational level of the armed forces—about six years of formal education—is significantly higher than in the early 1960s.

Militarization

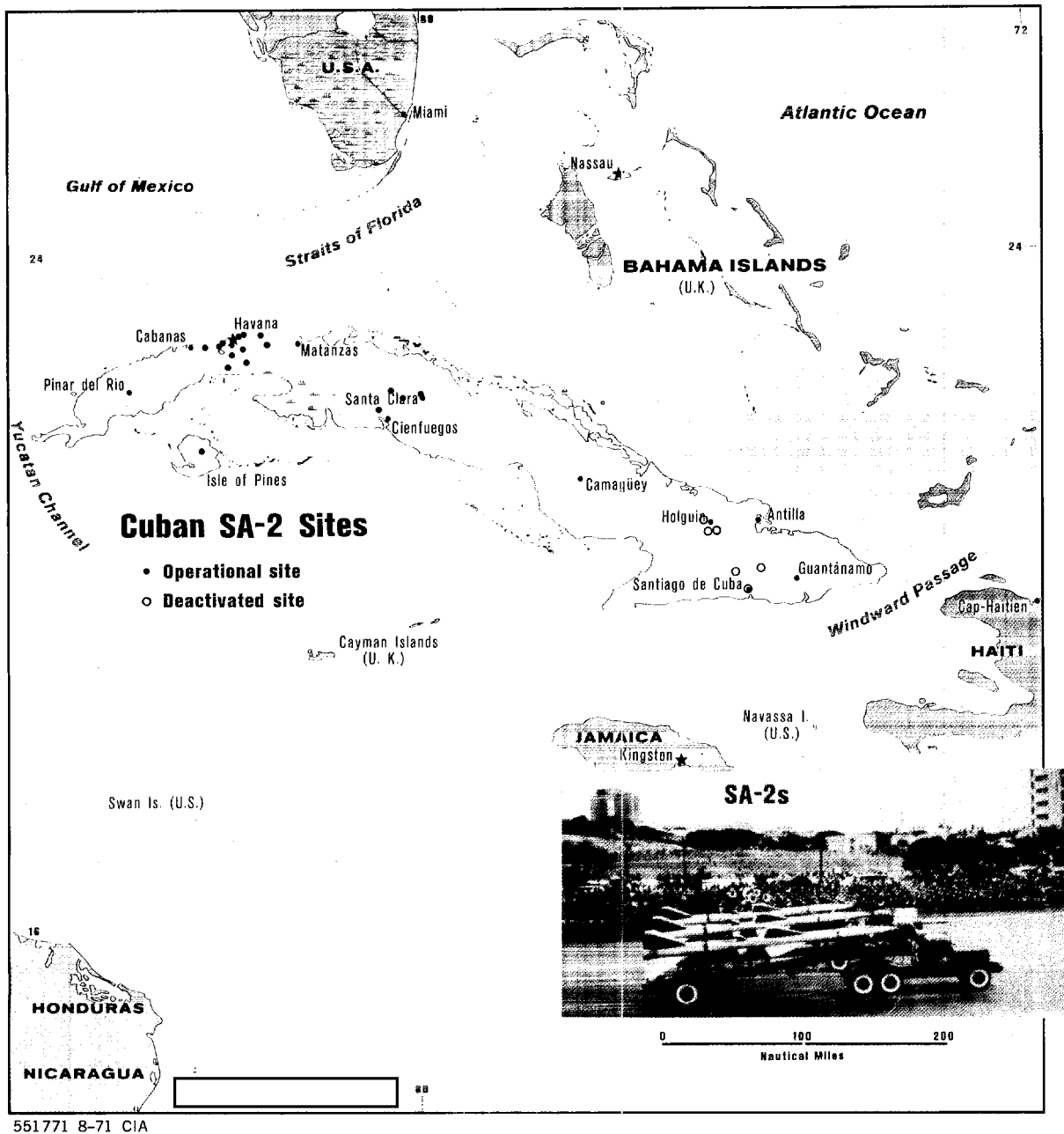
Since 1967 the Cuban military establishment has become increasingly involved in activities normally considered outside the realm of national defense. The Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR), under the tight control of Raul Castro, has gradually assumed a major role in the areas formerly delegated to the ministries of Education, Sugar Industry, and Construction, as well as other governmental agencies, primarily because it is a source of highly mobile, disciplined labor and because its officers provide the only real cadre of competent administrators in the country.

Fidel Castro's use of the armed forces as a source of labor has broadened gradually; in 1970 some 100,000 military personnel were used in the sugar harvest. In addition, troops were employed in road building, dam construction, land clearing, and other domestic tasks. Furthermore, officers were placed in many top administrative positions throughout the government, and the military establishment even began to absorb portions of the educational system. By 1970, for example, all technological institutes and some secondary schools had been shifted from the Education Ministry to MINFAR'S vice ministry for military technological training. The practice of naming military men to key administrative posts has also continued. A former chief of the general staff was named education minister in mid-1970, an army supply officer was appointed minister of internal trade, and when the new Ministry of Merchant Marine and Ports was formed in August 1970, Major Angel Joel Chaveco Hernandez was appointed to head it. As of mid-1971, 11 of the government's 22 ministerial posts were held by military officers.

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Armed Forces Cutbacks

One of the first indications of the current trend in reducing the size of the armed forces appeared last year in the Frontier Brigade, the ground forces unit responsible for guarding the area surrounding the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in eastern Cuba. The Frontier Brigade underwent a major reorganization and reduction in force when four of its ten infantry companies were transferred to other units.

To permit the cutback in the brigade's strength and reduce the need for manpower in patrolling the perimeter of the US naval base, the Cubans constructed a security barrier approximately 3,200 feet beyond and in most parts parallel to the fenceline around the base. The barrier consists of a series of three fences about 80 feet apart extending 18 miles around the western, northern, and eastern sides of the base. A single-lane road for vehicle and foot patrols has been built between the middle fence and one farthest from the base. In addition, elevated observation posts are spotted at key points along the barrier, and explosive devices and trip flares have been planted between the fences. The barrier has been very effective not only in allowing a reduction in the brigade's strength but also in reducing the number of refugees who seek political asylum inside the US naval base.

Deactivation of SAM Sites

Concurrent with the barrier construction and the reduction of the Frontier Brigade, the only two SAM brigades in eastern Cuba were deactivated. The removal of SAM-associated equipment from the sites at Holguin Airfield and San Pedro de Cacocum was noted in aerial photography. [redacted] the sites at Santiago de Cuba and

Holguin (west) had also been vacated. Two months later, the Palma Soriano and La Maya sites, the only ones remaining on the eastern end of the island, were vacated. [redacted]

Recent photographs also show that construction of permanent buildings is taking place at the Santiago de Cuba SAM site and that the site's easternmost missile launch position has been demolished—solid evidence that the deactivation is permanent. Support facilities that formerly served the two SAM brigades have also been vacated, and at one location one of the buildings has been dismantled. To fill the gap in the air defense system created by the deactivation of the SAM brigades, a contingent of MIG-21s was shifted from western Cuba to Holguin to supplement the MIG-15s stationed there.

Closing an Officers School

In May 1971, the General Ignacio Agramonte Officers School in Mantanzas was closed permanently after 11 years of operation. The school was established in April 1961 to train cadres for the militia, and later concentrated on educating men on active duty who were already serving as unit chiefs in positions normally filled by lieutenants or captains. The functions of the school, which graduated more than 8,000 officers during its existence, have been transferred to the larger General Antonio Maceo Interservice Cadets School at Ceiba del Agua, near Havana.

The closing of the school, according to *Verde Olivo*, the Cuban armed forces magazine, came about because the "timely aid of the Soviet Union" and the "great organization and combat ability" of the Cuban armed forces "have provided us with the chance to reduce the use of human resources and materials which are so needed to support the economic plans of the country." There are now only five schools for

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providing the armed forces with regular officers: the school at Ceiba del Agua; the Military Technological Institute in Havana; the Naval Academy at Mariel; the Captain Carlos Ulloa Aviation Cadets School at San Julian; and the Camilo Cienfuegos Artillery Cadet School at La Cabana Fortress in Havana. Reserve officers continue to be supplied by the universities.

Castro Confirms Cutbacks

Fidel Castro, who is commander in chief of the armed forces in addition to functioning as

head of the party and government, first hinted of reductions in the military establishment a year ago. In addressing the Cuban Women's Federation on 23 August 1970, he spoke of reducing "the mass of permanent fighters" in the armed forces by developing highly trained and efficient cadres who could be called upon to lead the masses "in case of aggression." Although he warned against being careless of the country's defenses, he implied that regular units on active duty would be replaced by reserve units. These units maintain a skeleton cadre on permanent active status with the rank and file capable of reporting for duty within 24 hours of call-up.

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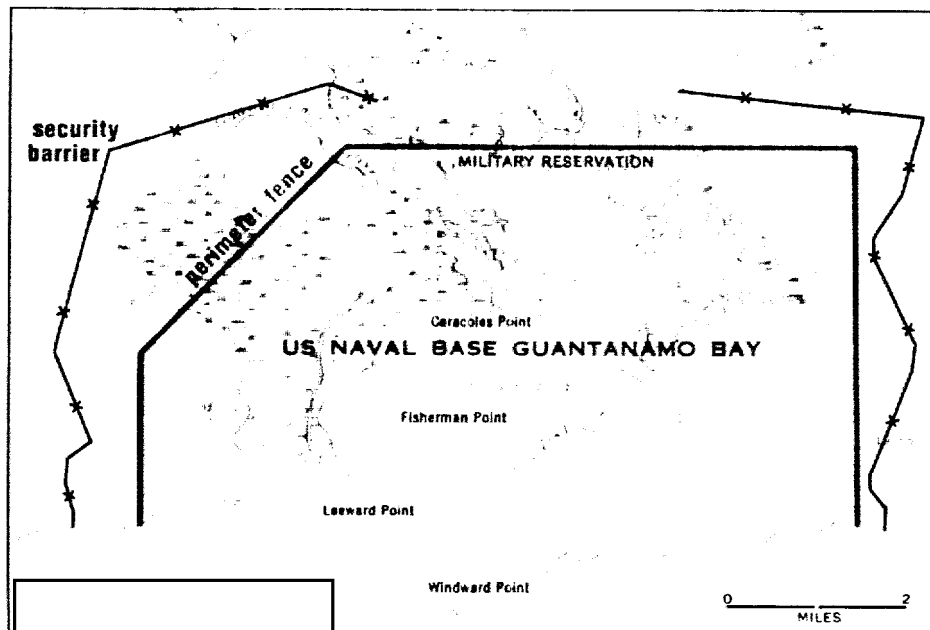
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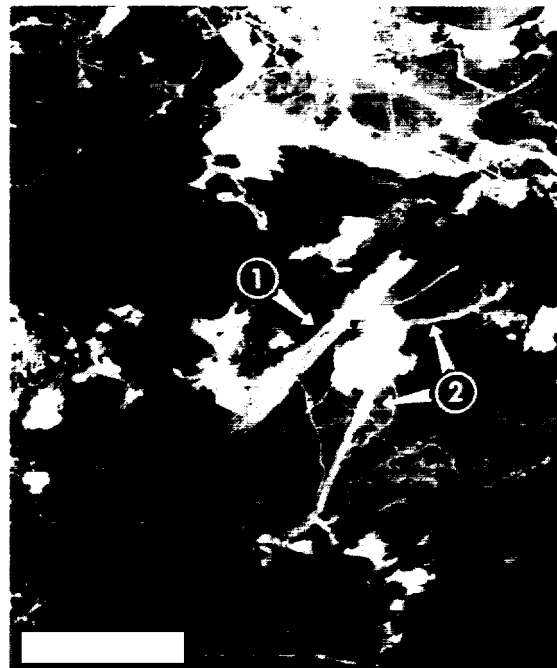
Western Section



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Eastern Section



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1 Perimeter fence

2 New security construction consisting of 3 parallel [REDACTED] fences [REDACTED]

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Castro was more specific in his May Day speech this year. In describing the manner in which the government would meet the increasing demand for labor, he said: "We are also working on manpower savings in the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior. For more than a year now the comrades of the Revolutionary Armed Forces have been hard at work reducing the number of permanent personnel and at the same time maintaining and even increasing the combat readiness of our armed forces." He acknowledged that 70-80,000 soldiers had worked in the 1970 sugar harvest on a permanent basis, but indicated that the cutbacks would go even beyond that in contributing to the national work force. He estimated the reduction in the armed forces and the Ministry of the Interior would be over 100,000 men and pointed out that they would be involved in productive activity in industry, agriculture, and elsewhere throughout the entire year and not just during the harvesting season.

Greater Reliance on the Reserves

The ground forces will suffer the greatest reduction in permanent personnel because they are by far the largest component of the armed forces and thus have the greatest amount of "fat" that can be safely cut. In addition, the ground forces lend themselves more readily to the ready reserve system than do the other services, which in general require personnel with a higher level of technical skills. Unfortunately, personnel levels in the ground force are also the most difficult to monitor and the extent of cutbacks cannot now be assessed.

So far, the only cuts noted in the navy took place in the radar surveillance units in eastern Cuba. All units afloat seem to be in active status, and manpower reductions have apparently been confined to personnel ashore. DAAFAR has experienced reductions in both its AAA component and the SAM system, which was reduced by about 25 percent.

Reserve Militia



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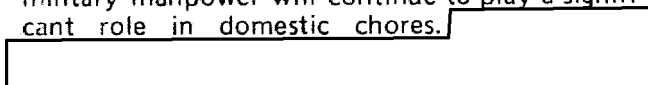
It is doubtful that the Revolutionary Air Force has suffered much from manpower cuts; no significant changes have been observed in the number of air force personnel. Reductions in this branch will probably be confined to operations rather than personnel or equipment.

Conclusions

Cuba's economic problems are far too complex and profound to be altered significantly either by streamlining the military or by other moves the regime has instituted thus far. Castro's single-handed effort over the past 12 years to guide and improve the economy has been basically a futile one. Per capita output has declined and shortages of consumer goods exist through-

out the entire island. In addition, this year's sugar harvest fell more than one million tons short of the seven-million-ton goal. Much of Cuba's domestic difficulties stems from low morale and lack of incentive, but the primary problems result directly from Castro's poor management.

Inasmuch as Castro continues to stress the threat of US military intervention, he will never permit his armed forces to be weakened to the point of becoming ineffective. In addition to defending his regime from external attack, the armed forces constitute his main source of power in the domestic political field. Castro will continue military exercises involving the ground forces, artillery, navy, and air force; behind the scenes military manpower will continue to play a significant role in domestic chores.



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